

**Minutes of the Williams Lake Conservation Company (WLCC)  
Annual General Meeting – 11 June 2024 – Captain William Spry Library**

**Welcome and Land Acknowledgement**

President Murray Coolican called the meeting to order, gave a warm welcome to all attendees, and acknowledged that the meeting was taking place on the ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet peoples. He expressed regret that David Patriquin and Martha Leary were not able to attend.

**Approval of the Agenda**

Murray Coolican called for a motion to approve the Agenda. Cathy Vaughan so moved, the motion was seconded by Sanja Trussell, and approved by all present.

**Approval of the Draft Minutes of the 2023 AGM**

Murray Coolican called for a motion to approve the Draft Minutes of the 2023 AGM. It was so moved by Debbie Hall, seconded by Melanie Dobson, and approved by all present.

**Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Debbie Hall presented the report for the fiscal year running from June 1, 2023 to May 31, 2024. She provided details of the current WLCC bank balance of \$9267.38 as of 31 May 2024, and a review of expenditures and income from membership, donations, and grants from HRM and the Captain William Spry Library. A motion to approve the financial statement was put forward by Melanie Dobson and seconded by Sanja Trussell. There were no objections, and the Treasurer's Report was approved.

**Nomination and Election of the Board for 2024-2025**

Murray Coolican proposed to accept the current slate of board members. It was so moved by Sanja Trussell, and seconded by Cathy Vaughan. As there were no objections the Board, consisting of President Murray Coolican, Treasurer Debbie Hall and Secretary Leslie Randall, was elected for the coming year. Murray Coolican confirmed that Michael Conway has withdrawn as an active Director, but will continue to provide legal advice as needed. Murray also introduced new Director Matt McCabe.

**Williams Lake Water Testing Results**

Melanie Dobson provided a detailed presentation on the year's schedule of water testing, and placed it within the history of testing on the lake. Testing has been done continuously since 2002, and the 22 years of data collected provides solid information to local government about issues related to the lake. A graph of water levels showed how 2023 was an "outlier" year with unusually heavy rainfall maintaining lake levels. This year, after a dry Spring, the lake is at its lowest level in 22 years for this time of year, and is falling at a faster rate than other years.

Melanie reported that fecal coliform levels are safe across all years, and that there are undetectable levels of phosphate and nitrogen in the lake, showing that fertilizer is not yet a problem. However, levels of iron are rising, especially in Colpitt Lake which feeds Williams Lake. She noted that acidity, measured as pH level, is far less than in the 1980's, but that this may allow a surge in unwanted plant growth. Salt/conductivity monitoring by Charles Bull reveals an uptick in salt levels, though overall the situation is acceptable, but must be watched carefully. Two WLCC Directors, Katie Studholme and Stephen Glazier, will participate in the LakeWatchers Program, helping to monitor 72 lakes in HRM, including Williams Lake.

Blue-green algae is a growing problem in the lake. Milfoil is a water plant that is choking the Frog Pond, and is now in Williams Lake, attracted by the neutral pH of the water. Unattended, it will clog waterways and must be handled carefully, as breaking off pieces causes it to spread. Cathy Vaughan has posted signs alerting boaters and kayakers to clean hulls after use. Katie Studholme noted that there has not been a definitive identification of the plant - either native milfoil, or invasive Eurasian Carolina fanwort - but she will be sampling to make sure there is no fanwort. Melanie reiterated that shallow, warm, pH neutral, slow-moving water, increasingly found in Williams Lake, encourages overgrowth of plants.

#### Remarks by The Honourable Brendan Maguire, Minister of Community Services

Brendan Maguire took the floor to thank the WLCC for its actions in support of the Lake, the watershed, and the community. He outlined exactly where we are in the process of moving forward with a fix for the Williams Lake dam, noting that the funds are approved, the design agreed, that Kim Masland and Tim Huston are behind it, and there is considerable support from Councillors like Patty Cuttell and Shawn Cleary. To solidify support, work on the Chocolate Lake Dam is being rolled in to the Williams Lake dam project. Murray Coolican praised Brendan for his active support, pointing out that though the WLCC has been working on the issue for decades, funding their own engineering report, recent developments have undoubtedly been spurred by Brendan and the WLDA under Margo Kerr.

#### Invasive Plants and Nature Conservancy of Canada Clean-up

Melanie Dobson profiled three invasive and highly destructive plant species: Rosa multiflora, Barberry, and Knotweed - and announced a Clean-up Day jointly with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to be held August 1st. Volunteers are urged to join in the effort.

#### Bird Team Activities

Katie Studholme, reporting in Martha Leary's absence, profiled increasing efforts to monitor birds in the Backlands as important indicators of ecosystem health. The Backlands, including the Williams Lake watershed, are home to a wide variety of habitats, and feature multiple types of waterways: vernal pools, streams, wetlands and lakes. Involving the community in bird activities is an excellent way to connect people with their local environment and to encourage stewardship.

Katie provided an overview of birding projects:

- 1) Early Spring events - including a media blitz on ground-nesting birds, promoting increased awareness of trail etiquette, with 4 ground-nesting birds highlighted, and photos by Joshua Barss Donham.
- 2) Bird Walks - for the third year, 4 well-attended bird walks during the Spring migration were organized in partnership with the Captain William Spry Library, lead by Fulton Lavender.
- 3) Participation in Halifax Bird Week - over 20 species were noted, and by May 5 the number has climbed to over 40.
- 4) Bird Surveys - seasonal efforts to ascertain the number of birds in the area, owls in winter and Common nighthawks during their Spring breeding season.
- 5) Canadian Lakes Loon Survey - monitoring the local loon pair on Williams Lake.
- 6) Historical Bird Data Project - utilizing data on the iNaturalist site, teasing out trends of bird species and numbers over time.
- 7) Common Nighthawk Project - these birds breed in open habitats, and nest on the ground. Their numbers are declining due to habitat loss and lack of insects, so protecting their habitat is crucial. A 2023 Pilot Study successfully tested Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) to determine the existence of breeding pairs. Now ARUs have been purchased and 2 graduate students will track data in 6 locations in the Backlands.

#### Report on the Dam

Cathy Vaughan presented a short video surveying the current state of the dam, the history of attempts to fix it, and the urgent need to address the issue.

#### Provincial Crown Lands

Kathleen Hall provided background on the formation of the Backlands Coalition in 2013. The mission of the BC is to protect all undeveloped land within the Backlands boundary and this includes the Provincial Crown Lands. Steps were taken to encourage the province to change the current status of the Crown Lands. The opportunities Committee created by Murray Coolican consists of Karen McKendry, Boris Worm and Kathleen. It made a presentation to several Provincial Government employees. The ask was to protect the Crown Lands under the Protected Areas Strategy. The presentation was augmented by the Backlands Balance Sheet which was created by Martha Leary and maps created by Jennifer Escott.

## Recent Land Acquisition

Kathleen Hall confirmed that land formerly owned by the Church of Christ Development Corp. has now been purchased by HRM. It is hoped that the Nature Conservancy of Canada will incorporate this parcel into the existing Shaw Wilderness Park, which it adjoins.

## Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, Murray Coolican noted the importance of the WLCC's credibility and consistency over the years, helped by supportive politicians who listened to our concerns and acted on them. He acknowledged the contributions of Shawn Cleary who has been instrumental, and Patty Cuttell who helped spearhead the effort with Councillors on the Regional Plan Review. The support of Brendan Maguire is pivotal, now the matter of the dam has become a Provincial matter.

WLCC has a record of organizing the facts, and getting the message across. Kathleen Hall was crucial in getting the Shaw Wilderness Park approved, which has spurred purchase of the Church of Christ lands. We are aided by partner organizations like the McIntosh Run Watershed Association, whose world-class single-track trails help focus attention on the value of the Backlands. It takes a broad coalition to protect the environment of the Backlands as a whole.

## Question and Answer Session

Murray Coolican solicited any questions from the attendees.

## New Business

There was no new business.

## Adjournment

Murray Coolican thanked all presenters and attendees for their ongoing interest in and support for the WLCC. He solicited a motion to adjourn the meeting. Melanie Dobson so moved, and it was seconded by Robin Whyte. All were in agreement, and the meeting was adjourned.

Everyone enjoyed refreshments and baking supplied by Debbie Hall.